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# EMBERS

O'HARA

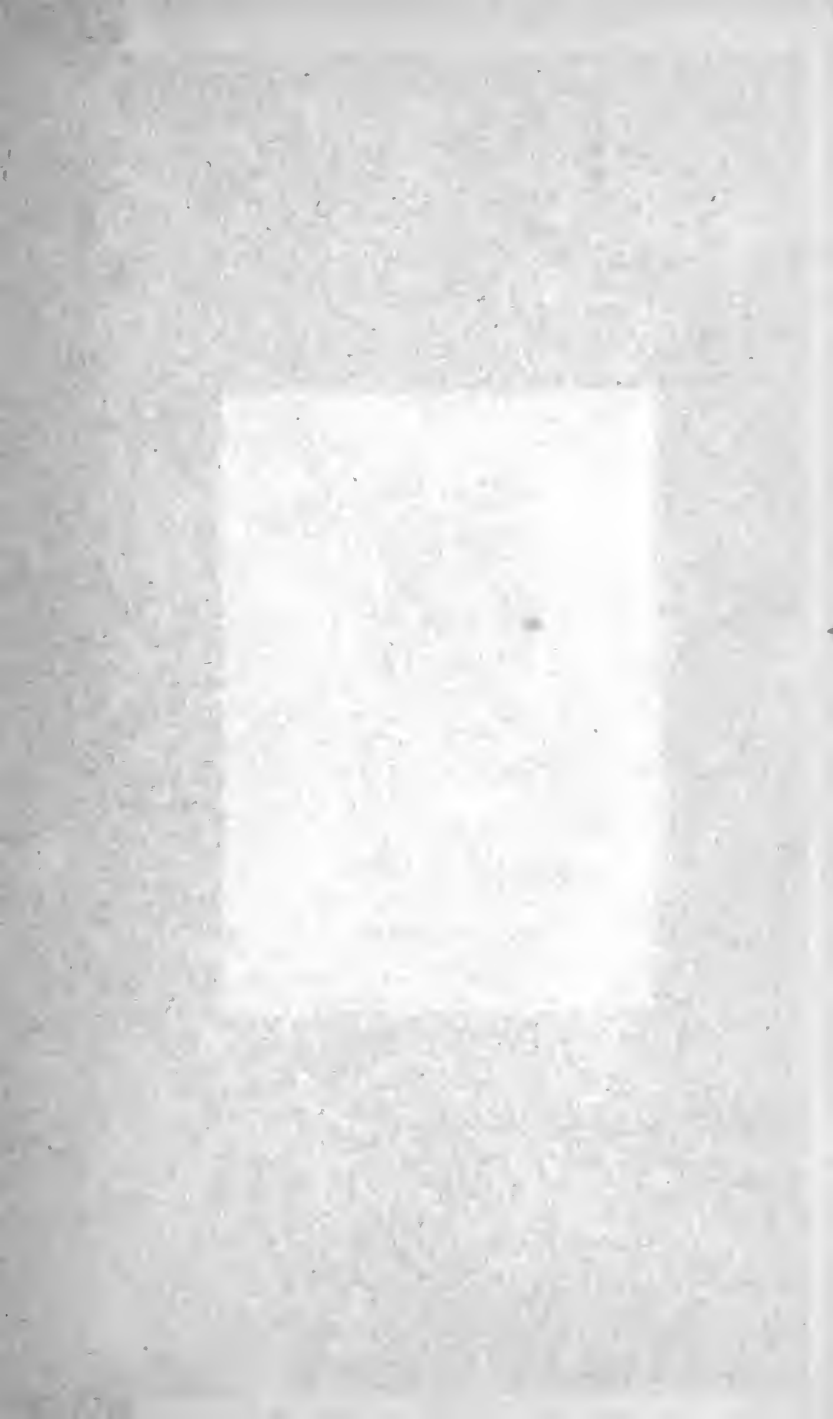


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EMBERS



# EMBERS

BY

JOHN MYERS O'HARA

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PORTLAND MAINE  
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TO  
THOMAS M. McKEE

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E M B E R S



## EMBERS



HE fitful flickers from the embers start,  
The embers in the ashes of my heart;  
Gray ashes of the flame that is no more,  
What epic passions burned you to the core!

Ashes, I stir you softly in my breast,  
Search the red coals and rake them from the rest;  
I hoard them in a heap and try to blow  
The sudden glimmer to a leaping glow.

The embers whiten and refuse the flame,  
Red glory that I never may reclaim;  
Oh, memory, I shiver in the night!  
You, too, desert me with the lost delight.

## THE BROODING DUSK

**L**IKE cryptic figures on a shattered frieze,  
Slowly my thoughts in broken sequence pass,  
The pathos of rejected deities,  
Torn from a temple's once harmonic mass;

Processional before me as I brood,  
They move as shapes to some impending doom,  
And cold as marble to my sombre mood,  
They shroud my soul in unabating gloom.



## EPHEMERÆ

SO careless of the myriads that dream,  
The little wraiths of dust that walk the earth,  
Can any but a visionary deem  
That Nature shaped them for immortal birth?

The little toiling clutchers of a day,  
The human swarms that grope upon the sphere,  
Can any have the insolence to say  
That such to any deity are dear?

Could God imagine these and not despise?  
Like bubbles on the sea they rise and fall;  
Oh, is it any wonder that the wise  
See nothing but oblivion for all?

## THE VISTA

**T**HE vista of the hills, where one by one,  
Along the sky, with misty heads, they go,  
Belated pilgrims marching toward the sun,  
Touched by its fading glow;

It is the lordly way of perished dreams,  
Where classic poms, that once enthralled my soul,  
Returning lure me with their phantom gleams  
To seek some regal goal.

## AVOWAL

**I** WILL not drink of life from any beaker,  
Except the brimming one that I adore;  
I will not share the worship of the weaker,  
Confiding in the faith that is no more.

I will not barter for celestial glory  
The nearer blessing of the mortal best;  
I will not listen to the futile story  
Of any heaven but eternal rest.

I will not deem earth's splendid ways unholy,  
When truth and abnegation are at odds;  
I will not be a beggar craving solely  
The crumbs beneath the table of the gods.

## LOST GLORIES

**S**TILL must the glamor of the city's night  
Lure with the dear enchantment of their eyes;  
Under the spell, indissolubly bright,  
Lost glories, through long memory, arise;

Glories that gather back their faded crowns,  
In amaranthine freshness for my gaze;  
Such for the parts, the princes and the clowns,  
That my dead life, recalled, returns and plays.

## LIGHTS

**I**NSUPERABLE lights, you are my life,  
Braving the shadow to the final goal!  
Supreme illusion, over human strife  
You shed a glamor sateless to my soul.

Your fever, in my veins, is like dread wine,  
The banquet cup with poison in the lees;  
And yet no fear can make it less divine,  
Nor rob it of its high felicities.

You weave a magic to enchant the nights,  
Forever true, you bring me fair romance;  
My opiate you are, poetic lights,  
I drink your splendor in a mighty glance!

## THE TRINITY

YOUTH, love, and art,  
The trinity,  
These, in the heart,  
Will live for me;

Youth, for the hope,  
Love, for the thrill,  
Art, for the scope  
Of vision still.

Dreamers who raise  
Altars to these,  
Make of their days  
Eternities.

## THE SYBARITE

A THREAD of smoke, sheathing a tongue of flame,  
That curling through the massive pillars came;  
Then rushing slaves who flung the kindling brands,  
And spread the fire with torches in their hands;  
And through the palace, from the sloping throne,  
Swept a great cry of terror; while, alone,  
Impassive in the tumult and the fright,  
Serenely sat the splendid Sybarite.

I know not why its horror haunts me thus,  
The smoking pyre of Sardanapalus,  
Here, in this calm, where mountains lift their heights  
Against the most superbly starred of nights;  
Nor why the hateful vision should intrude,  
And mar for me the heart's exalted mood,  
In this absolving hour when I have cast  
Out of my soul the dregs of all the past.

## MAD NIGHTS

**M**AD nights tossed deathward in the haggard dawn,  
Kingdoms we squandered swift in beauty's quest,  
Hours envied of the gods, forever gone,  
Ye leave an urn of ashes in my breast!

Mad nights, redreamed, ye throng to memory fast,  
Shake me with love and laughter, wit and wine;  
Pleasures that were imperial in the past,  
And nevermore may sway this heart of mine!



## AS ONCE CALLIMACHUS

AS those two friends, in old lands far away,  
Long centuries ago, the grave and wise,  
Who strolled together at the close of day,  
And talked the Pagan sun adown the skies;

So we two chat together, but we sit  
With art around us and the softened lights,  
Instead of twilight that the Pharos lit,  
Under the splendor of Egyptian nights.

What words were yours, Callimachus, none know,  
Nor what the discourse of your Carian friend,  
But though our vagrant thoughts like gipsies go,  
Art is the goal where all our gossips end.

Picture and statue, while we laugh and joke,  
And with our fragrant coffee linger yet,  
Assume a halo as you blow the smoke  
In lazy spirals from your cigarette.

We talk the stars across eternal space,  
Beauty and art the still recurring themes;—  
Ah, should one miss the other in his place,  
Then that shall be the night of saddest dreams.

If mine the fate, recall me ever thus,  
The genial comrade of those royal years,  
And if you go, as once Callimachus,  
I leave this song to tell you of my tears.

## THE HOLOCAUST

**A**T Delia's house, in Rome, the poet stood,  
Pensive among the guests, that festal night;  
A hand stole into his as one that would  
Caress him back to laughter and delight.

And Delia, jesting, thus: "When thou art dead,  
Hast chosen what thy epitaph shall be?"  
Tibullus mused a moment, then he said:  
"O Song, what hearts he sacrificed to thee!"

## THE HEARTH

**I**N cynical seclusion from the world,  
The storm has made me hermit for the night,  
While the mad gust against the pane is hurled,  
And all the ways are lost in blinding white.

I snatch a fair communing hour from life,  
A gracious respite from the venal plan,  
And shielded by the elemental strife,  
I live a little space the finer man.

I prod the coals and rake the ashes thin,  
Adjust me snugly in my easy chair,  
And breathe a sigh of vast contentment when  
I take the cherished book and banish care.

Ah, not with sparing zeal the Roman fought  
For hearth and altar in the ancient days;  
I feel the dual comfort that he caught  
Beside the bright religion of the blaze.

And what benigner comrade could I claim,  
With rarer wisdom for the sheltered glow,  
Than he who pondered by the crackling flame,  
While round his Sabine villa fell the snow.

## APRIL DUSK

NIGHT, one star, the mystic hush of the mountains,  
Far below, the curve of the shining river,  
Under slopes that blend in the dusk of April,  
Kissed by the warm wind;

Earthy fragrance, after the rain, and silence,  
In the hills, and over the purple valley;  
Then, again, the nearer note of the plaintive  
Whip-poor-will calling.

## DAWN AT LESBOS

UNDER lifting wings of the sullen darkness,  
Ere the East was red with the blush of Eos,  
Lesbos rose, an isle in a sea of opal,  
Out of the shadow;

Dimly rose, and out of the dreaming distance,  
Out of waves that woke with a sighing ripple,  
Seemed a lyre for gods that the bending heaven  
Guarded in silence;

But the ruthless lances of light assailed it,  
Sudden light that, striking from hill to valley,  
Made the olives shine on the crest and shimmer  
Green to the water;

Green as waves that leaped in the sun to sapphire,  
Waves that laughed and kissed with a foaming whisper,  
While the wheeling legions of dawn were sweeping  
Night from the summit;

Then our eyes, entranced with the ancient wonder,  
Saw upflame the slope in a snow of blossoms,  
Mitylene, trailing her bright Ægean  
Vesture of azure;

Crowned again with pride of an olden April,  
Pride of deathless song and of templed glory,  
Seeming now, as once from a Roman galley,  
Music to vision;

Yet we knew a strain to the ear diviner,  
Not of dawn, the nightingale in the orchard,  
Sappho's own, with grief in the note ecstatic,  
Mourning her ever.

## THE PAGAN

**I**F I am still the Pagan in my pride,  
And dream the life that destiny denied,  
If through triumphant avenues my soul  
Would climb in pomp to some exalted goal;

If I can see no joy beyond my dream,  
And pass contemptuous of the common scheme,  
If ardor for the beauty that I crave  
Would make me both the monarch and the slave;

Esteem me for a fault not wholly mine,  
But vital by the will of the divine;  
The God, who gave to one his crown of thorns,  
Ordained for me the faun's symbolic horns.

## THEOXENIA

THE banquets of the gods when they resented  
The first flush of the dawn's invading fire,  
Such feasts alone could make us discontented,  
When the pale torches of the stars expire;

We dream of them tonight, with glasses lifted,  
And pledge the revels that Olympus knew;  
It seems, with ours, a clinking downward drifted,  
An echo of ambrosial laughter, too;

And presently, a sound of goblets broken,  
Lest other lips should desecrating drink;  
We toss our glasses hearthward at the token,  
A valediction from the heaven's brink.

## SECLUSION

NOT the bright world, the triumph for the truth,  
The clashing steel of combat and the crown,  
Not the thronged highways of impetuous youth,  
But the past's dreaming in the sleepy town;

Not the high ardor of the heart's hot flame,  
The sweep of eager vision from the crest,  
Not the proud chaplet of undying fame,  
But the supreme beatitude of rest.



## DE SENECTUTE

**S**HALL senile blight be mine, the trembling hand,  
The twisted back, the slow and halting pace?  
Shall I, with eyes that fail me, helpless stand,  
And shade the wrinkled parchment of my face?

Rather for me the swift releasing draught,  
The stroke that brings oblivion to the brain,  
For I, who worshipped youth, and loved and laughed,  
Could not endure decay's ignoble stain.

Better to drain the cup as Socrates,  
Or, Cæsar-like, to fall upon the sword;  
Rather an epic end, sublime as these,  
Than linger out the life that I adored.

## RETROSPECT

AS with reverting gaze,  
I live the vanished days,  
O life, you seem to me  
A mockery.

For disenchantment gleams  
On all the futile dreams,  
The useless hopes and fears  
Of ashen years.

The joy that once was mine,  
A glamor half divine,  
Has left the dregs of pain  
I shrink to drain.

And now to meet my mood  
Of cynic lassitude,  
O life, you dare confess  
Your emptiness;

And like a master cheat  
Reveal your long deceit,  
And jeer, as well you may,  
At what I say.

## RED CORONALS

WHY wreath me yet  
Red coronals of the relinquished past,  
I, who must soon forget  
All pomp of things, at last?

The agonist,  
The battler and the dreamer blended one,  
Why grieve what I have missed  
Of mighty deeds long done?

Why brooding cling  
To phantom conquests of a regal power,  
I, who may never bring  
The splendor back of that imperial hour?

Ah, vain to yield  
The futile dream with like serenity  
The wiser Greek revealed,  
Through all, for what must be!

Devoid of care  
For crimson wreaths my hands have cast away,  
May I, the dreamer, wear  
The laurel of a day.







## THE CLOSING SONG

**L**OVE, from my heart  
The final flame,  
The last incense  
At the surrendered shrine.

Love, from my heart  
The ultimate sigh,  
The closing song  
Ere the long darkness falls.

## AN OLD BOUDOIR

*"Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées."*

I AM an old boudoir that faded roses fill,  
I dream in pallid sunlight of the past;  
The vases strew the floor with petals falling still,  
A listless snow on woven Cupids cast.

I hold the cherished heaps that tapers overburn,  
In cassolets that breathe of long ago;  
Rare roses of romance that make the heart return,  
A ghost to seek their unforgotten glow.



## THE TRYST

**T**HE purple shadow deepens on the river,  
From the crimson west the homing swallows dart,  
The trysting lights upon the distance quiver,  
When you sail up the Cydnus of my heart.

My veins are burning with a restless fever,  
And the sound of silver laughter makes me start;  
Will love abide, the friend or the deceiver,  
When you sail up the Cydnus of my heart?

Oh, if the fates decree that we must sever,  
At the Tarsus of the dream, if we should part,  
It is farewell, the night will fall forever,  
When you sail up the Cydnus of my heart.

## DOMINANCE

**O**LD tyrannies of passion haunt your eyes,  
With sullen flame beneath their glance serene;  
Wraiths of the lost entelechies that rise,  
The slaves, and you, the queen!

You hold the selves that mould you in the chains  
Whose grip their constant fury has defied;  
Over their imminent rebellion reigns,  
Imperial, your pride.

## NEPENTHE

**A**S shadows deepen toward the goal,  
I tire of all, of virtue, sin;  
Through every doorway of my soul,  
Aversion enters in.

Can no strong draught, no potent thing,  
Green freshness to the boughs restore?  
Must the returning fire of Spring  
Be mine, alas, no more?

Your lips reprove me, moist and red,  
So fresh with youth, so April sweet;  
Well, cling and let our mouths be wed,  
Bright flame and ashes meet.

## VESPER SADNESS

SADLY I see the earthward-stealing night,  
    Bearing the steady flambeau of a star,  
Approach the dim horizon where our white  
    Elusive dreamlands are;

Sadly I know your grieving thought, my own,  
    Of one far twilight that will surely come,  
Whose wistful beauty will be yours alone,  
    When my fond lips are dumb.

## THE QUEENS

ALL with one diadem,  
Beauty alone,  
Pass as I dream of them,  
Queens you dethrone;

All with the phantom grace  
Poets pursue,  
Fade and I see your face,  
Regnant anew.

Helen and Egypt go  
Back to the night,  
Out of the rhythmic glow,  
Once a delight.

Gone is the poet's spell,  
Vanished the fair,  
In the dark land they dwell,  
Ghosts of despair;

All of their high renown,  
Peerless so long,  
Dimmed by your double crown,  
Beauty and Song.

## THE METEOR

**A** FALLING star that trails a glowing track  
Down the soft moonless night,  
And disappears forever in the black  
Abysses quite;

So I have curved the flaming light of me  
Over your dreaming heart,  
And now from out its dusk eternally  
I must depart.

## AT THE OLD FERRY

LOVELY as once in life's dead dream,  
Down ways of underworld they came;  
He saw their forms as ivory gleam,  
(While swung the spirit-boat astream)  
Where one dim torch shed flame.

Like timid fawns they ventured near;  
(Slowly the boat forsook the shore)  
He saw them pause with sudden fear,  
As if, for mortal breath was dear,  
In anguish to implore.

Yet from their lips no vain appeal,  
No sob nor cry despairing fell;  
They seemed, a frozen group, to feel  
No more than carven nymphs that kneel  
To peer in Dian's well.

Then from that throng he loved of old,  
Whose grace his burning song had hymned,  
(Fair throng with dread now statue-cold)  
Flew one with hair of floating gold,  
And eyes by doubt undimmed;

And swift to dare the deeper gloom  
Along the ghostly river's marge,  
In all her beauty's nubile bloom,  
Flung her white body full at doom,  
And clung to Charon's barge.

## THE MESSAGE

**A**LL dreams that from my dreaming heart take flight  
Are doves that carry you my fond delight,  
White couriers of love's unending quest,  
Bearing my adoration to your breast.

All dreams that from my dreaming heart take wing  
Are nightingales that never cease to sing,  
Ecstatic minstrels pouring in your ear  
The passion that they waken you to hear.



## FLEURS D'AMOUR

*FLEURS d'Amour!* Ineffable perfume,  
That, in the haunting April of this room,  
Awakens my contrition, while the gust  
Sways the wet lilacs inward. So I must  
Live the dead passion over, at the same  
Window alone, as in the dusk that came  
With storm and stars to crown us. It is your  
Scent that compels remembrance, *Fleurs d'Amour!*

*Fleurs d'Amour!* Your fragrance chills my heart  
With breath of burial blooms. We cannot part  
While memory holds the vintage of the past  
To my remorseful lips. I drain and cast  
The frail glass from me, hearing, like a knell,  
The shattered music pierce me with farewell;  
But you, her unforgiving ghost, endure  
To grant me no oblivion, *Fleurs d'Amour!*

## ANOMALY

**W**HY is it that, with all your sin  
    Around you like a robe of red,  
I see a chapel you are in,  
    An aureole above your head?

Why is it that, tonight, with all  
    Your charms that stir the senses so,  
I see you on the painted wall,  
    A virgin of Angelico?

## THE MIRROR

MIRROR of old Versailles,  
Clear as the dew,  
Exquisite phantoms lie  
Hidden in you.

Dreaming of days long gone,  
Yours, once, in France,  
Beauties, that languidly yawn,  
Out of you glance;

Eyes of the Pompadour,  
Or Parabère,  
After the grand amour,  
Wearily stare.

Mirror, your oval wave,  
Circled with gold,  
Never again may lave  
Sirens of old.

For, in another land,  
Distant, alas,  
Others within you stand  
Smiling and pass;

Ghosts of a gay caprice,  
Queens of a night,  
Mocking at love's surcease,  
Vanish from sight.

## DISILLUSION

**A**ND so you stand between me and my dream,  
With what you are to mock at what you seem;  
You shatter with the challenge of your eyes  
The thoughts that haunt you to idealize.

I dream you in idyllic myths that make  
You fair as any vision that you take,  
And every fond illusion you dispel  
With the ironic smile you wear so well.

## FOR SANDRO'S BRUSH

WAS Simonetta's hair  
That golden red  
Of yours? And was she fair  
As you? And what was said  
In that far Spring?  
Or were all words too weak for uttering,  
When Botticelli saw her beauty blush  
Immortal for his brush?

But vain that I should see,  
Without his gift,  
From your white shoulder free,  
The last veil downward drift;  
For never yet  
Had art so rare a vision to regret,  
And never were such unabandoned charms  
Lost to a lover's arms.

## PRESCIENCE

**I** PONDER how  
One like you, with your lore,  
A thousand years from now,  
Shall dream, by some far shore,  
Dreams that you dream no more.

Oh, unknown girl,  
How strange if I should still,  
Dust that the winds upwhirl,  
On some green Lesbian hill,  
With song, make your heart thrill!

## EPISODE

THE dancers throng the circle while they sit,  
Intent to parry irony with wit;  
The sensuous music's soporific beat  
Burns with a supplication for their feet;  
He has no secret that she may surprise,  
She veils the anger in her brooding eyes.

The languor of the drowsy strain enchants,  
They breathe the passing perfume of the dance,  
And yet, across the table, each resists,  
Still fencing like two wary duelists;  
She lights a cigarette, her last delay,  
Then, baffled, casts her reticence away.

## REMINISCENCE

**A**H, once for beauty like your own,  
Men fought at Troy;  
You waft a breath, from Hellas blown,  
That is my joy.

Enchantress of Ægean nights,  
The memory,  
Across the magic curve of lights,  
Entrances me;

And one, who shook the world, a queen,  
As beauty's due,  
A fancy of the philhellene,  
Relives in you.



## ASPHODELS

HOW strange that she,  
In mythic shadow of the dense dead pine,  
Should pluck for me,  
Then dreaming of the old Hadean spells  
By some strange fancy mine,  
These asphodels!

The fingers that once touched you, fadeless flowers,  
I miss, in sombre hours,  
Their tenderness that left you in my hand;  
In no idyllic land  
Shall I reclasp them, yielding me the rose  
That Paphos knows.

Oh, lead me where she fled,  
When I may roam the meadows of the dead;  
Beyond the ghostly stream,  
Lead me, some Pagan poet of my dream,  
And show me where, in what diviner dells,  
She gathers asphodels!

## DEAD LOVES

**B**Y memory's pale light, as they slowly pass,  
At the last evocation, heedless all  
Of my sad scrutiny, I know, alas,  
The night too soon to fall;

Wherein, without the great pain of regret,  
Leaving the singing ways that they had known,  
I shall reclaim the shadow and forget  
Aught that I may atone.

Dead loves, sad spectres from the sombre land,  
Returning now, the last time, nevermore,  
Each with the flameless flambeau in the hand,  
To seek the mortal shore;

A final valediction, ere you go  
Back to eternal darkness and the goal  
Of old oblivion, where the effacing flow  
Of Lethe waits my soul.

## A GRECIAN GIRL

IN that divine half circle of the sun,  
That day of splendor and imperial dreams,  
When mountain after mountain rose beyond  
The spacious valley over which our eyes  
Swept far for visions—do you still recall,  
As I, its spell? Oh, never had there been  
So exquisite a sadness for the heart,  
So thronged a day with ghosts of old farewell,  
As that, our last, together! Antony,  
Mad loser of the world for love, not he  
Held once so fair a head upon his breast,  
Nor had the flaming sunset from the Nile  
A redder gold than glistened in your hair.  
You make great memories, slowly from the past,  
Float shining to my soul! Time's fairest come,  
And, through your eyes that sadden, look away  
To hills that are not Hellas; but their sighs  
Still linger, like a perfume, on your lips.  
Who else could bring me back those Grecian days,  
Regive to me the magic of the mood,  
Ah, who, but you alone, as now I dream?  
You turn the profile of your face to me,  
And time swings backward like an open door;—  
The apple blossoms, drifting down the slope,  
Drift farther toward the blue Saronic wave;  
A marble temple rises on the height,  
Whose frieze is golden with the touch of time,  
And marching on it to eternity,  
The maidens and the heroes and the gods;  
And one, that has your profile, marches, too;  
O sculptured Grecian girl of long ago,  
Were you beloved so? Did he bring you, thus,  
Such rapture of the heart? No answer, none!  
Only the heavy shadow of the years,

Only the vaster silence; such the space  
Between us then and now; but still your eyes  
Retain the violet of the evening mist  
On the Ægean; still your lips repeat  
The passion of the past. Oh, here, my queen,  
I crown you in my heart! Farewell, farewell!  
The darkness deepens on the hills, the night  
Falls on the river; soon the ultimate night  
Shall fall on us again. O Grecian girl,  
Will you forget, while I remember still?

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